

**Farhad Khosrokhavar**

**Failed transitions from Monarchy in the Middle East and North Africa**

**Not to be quoted**

### **1-The four failed monarchies in the region**

There are many cases of failed transitions from monarchies in the Middle East, the most notable ones being the Egyptian case (Farouk, the last king, 1936-1952), the Iranian (Mohammad Reza Shah, the last king, 1941-1979), the Ottoman (the last Sultan, Mehmet VI, 1918-1922) and the Afghan monarchy (In 1973 Zahir Shah's brother-in-law, Mohammed Daoud Khan, launched a coup and became the first President of Afghanistan, thus ending the Afghan monarchy).

In the Egyptian case, in 1952 a military coup occurred, carried out by a group calling itself "The Free Officers" and led by General Muhammad Neguib. The true power-holder within the group was the colonel Gamal Abdel Nasser. The new rulers instituted a land reform and proceeded to disown the rich land-owners. Nasser declared full independence from the British in 1956 and nationalized the Suez Canal in the same year. Arab nationalism became the ideological motto of the new Egyptian regime, called the Arab Republic of Egypt.

In the case of Mohammad Reza Shah, he took the power from his father Reza Shah in 1941, forced to abdicate in the same year by the Allied Forces occupying Iran during the Second World War, for his pro-German tendencies and in order to secure Iran for the transport of weapons to the Soviet Union.

Mohammad Reza Shah instituted a Land Reform to disown the large landowners and modernize the country. He contributed to the creation of the modern middle classes and, at the same time, restricted the political scene to his autocratic rule, excluding the very same people who could have backed him in his reformist tendencies. The Islamic Revolution in Iran in 1979 caused an unprecedented uproar in the region, encouraged the Soviet Union to invade Afghanistan in the same year, created an environment pushing towards active radicalization a group of young Arab Sunni insurgents in Saudi Arabia (led by Juhayman al U Taybi) in the same year and totally reshaped the politics of the region by changing the structure of the major alliances in the Persian Gulf.

The Ottoman case follows the same pattern as the Egyptian one. A group of young officers, the Young Turks, among whom Mustafa Kemal played the major role, took the power in 1922

as a result of a young crisis spreading over more than a century, from the Tanzimat period of 1836 and failed constitutional reforms. The loss of huge territories, the siding of the Ottoman Empire with the Germans in the First World War, the economic problems arising from a traditional system and the rise of nationalism in the vast expanses of the Ottoman empire, all cause dits collapse. The new architects of reform substituted Turkish nationalism to the Islamic ideal of the Caliphate, promoted modern state building, set up a modern educational system in which a new European scripture replaced the old Arabic one and instituted the French ideal of "laïcité" as the ideological backbone of the new Turkish identity.

In the case of Afghanistan, in 1973 Zahir Shah's brother-in-law, Mohammed Daoud Khan, launched a bloodless coup and became the first President of Afghanistan.

After that, factional fights within the ruling groups became constant until the Soviet invasion of Afghanistan in 1979. In 1978 a prominent member of the People's Democratic Party of Afghanistan, Mir Akbar Kaibar was killed by the government. The leaders of PDPA apparently feared that Daoud was planning to exterminate them all, especially since most of them were arrested by the government shortly after. Hafizullah Amin and a number of military wing officers of the PDPA managed to remain at large and organised an uprising.

The PDPA, led by Nur Mohammad Taraki, Babrak Karmal and Amin overthrew the regime of Mohammad Daoud, who was killed along with his family. The uprising was known as the Great Saur Revolution ('Saur' means 'April' in Pushto). On 1 May, Taraki became President , Prime Minister and General Secretary of the PDPA. The country was then renamed the Democratic Republic of Afghanistan (DRA), and the PDPA regime lasted, in some form or another, until April 1992.

## **2-The Iranian case and its hallmarks**

The Iranian case is the only genuinely revolutionary one: a social movement ending up in toppling the political power of the Shah. The other cases, the Egyptian, the Ottoman and the Afghan, are not based on a revolutionary movement but on a "military coup" by new elites, mainly within the armed forces.

Another feature of the Iranian revolution is its reference, for the first time, to Islam against a background where nationalism is still paramount in the Muslim world (1979). In the Muslim world, with the exception of Turkey, nationalism has always been forced to compromise with Islam, building up "metaphoric" Islamic constitutions or leaving the place open for a future Islamization (the case of the family law in Algeria). In the case of the monarchies, the

Moroccan one is explicitly based on Islam and the Sultan is the paramount religious authority in the country. In Iran, the Pahlavi monarchy was supposed to rule in conformity with Islam.

The Islamic revolution in Iran, nevertheless open up the vista for an exclusively Islamic rule (or government) in the Muslim world, putting into question even those fields that were tolerated under the heading of *urf* (traditional customs) in the Muslim jurisprudence.

On the whole, even the states claiming Islamic ascendancy (the major one being the Ottoman Empire) put the judiciary in the hands of the Muslim scholars, the other dimensions of political life being largely autonomous in regard to Islam. With the advent of the Islamic Republic of Iran, a new strategy, that of Islamic Guardianship is stipulated, whose aim is the total Islamization of social life, including the cultural, political, economic and individual dimensions. This maximalist approach is, of course, cannot be accomplished concretely, but it is not anymore a distant ideal and the educational system (that was wrested by the new nationalist governments from the traditional Islamic elites) has become Islamic, the cultural activities are being imposed the orthodox Islamic rules (the veil, the segregation of men and women and the forbidding of their physical contacts....).

Another feature of the Islamic revolution is that it turned a group of mainly quietist body, the clergy, into a partially ruling elite. Many non-clerical people joined the group, most of them with ties to activist Islamic groups, the clergy or the bazaar.

The Islamic Revolution happened in a context of deep legitimacy crisis for the monarchy in Iran. The shah's pattern of modernization excluded any political participation from the new civil society in a state of gestation. This led to a de facto alliance of the new modern middle classes with the traditionalist and Islamist groups directed by Ayatollah Khomeini.

Another feature of the Islamic revolution is its exceptional nature. It happened in a way that was unheard of, at least in a "developing country". The last revolution was the Russian and in a lesser degree, the Cuban. In the Muslim world, the major paragon was (and is) military coups rather than revolutions. After the Islamic Revolution in Iran, no other Muslim country underwent a revolution in the name of Allah and no monarchy was overthrown by Islamic forces. The Afghanistan domination by the Taliban occurred not through a revolution but a civil war, after the retreat of the Soviet forces and the political vacuum left there.

The Islamic Revolution in Iran ended the rule of an autocratic modernizing monarchy and inaugurated an oligarchic theocratic rule whose modernizing tendencies are concomitant with a culture closure, notably under the present conservative rule.

One other major distinctive feature of the Islamic Revolution in Iran is its anti-Western, anti-American feature, related to the English and American hegemony in the region and in the

Iranian case, the overthrow of Mossadegh with the direct help of the American and English intelligence services. The advent of the new Israeli nation after the second world war (1948) and its support by the US is another reason for the opposition of the Iranian theocracy to the US as well as the American policy in the region, against the Hizballah and Hamas as well as its support for the Sunni traditionalist regimes like Saudi Arabia.

On the whole, the overthrow of the Pahlavi monarchy by the Islamic forces in Iran has triggered a new dynamic in the Middle East, Islam becoming a major political actor not only in the Shi'ite, but also the Sunni societies where the political systems intend to integrate one of its versions (the "subservient Islamists" and the "moderate Islamists" like the Muslim Brotherhood and its offshoots).

Contrary to the Pahlavi regime, the Islamic theocracy seems to show signs of resilience, in spite of the lack of real economic development and the stagnation of the economy. If on the whole the economy is not in a major standstill, it is due to the rise in the price of oil and the increase of the revenues of the state.

On the other hand, the resilience of the Islamic theocracy is related to the capacity of the oligarchy in power to integrate, for some time at least, some fractions of the "tamed opposition", in particular, the "Islamic reformists" who had, exceptionally, the majority of the seats in the parliament during part of the period in which Khatami was the President (199-2005). In that period, Iran witnessed the development of social and cultural movements (the students' movement, the intellectuals', women and ethnic movements as well). The theocratic regime neutralized it progressively by using the judiciary and by implementing repression, legal and illegal, against the main leaders and intellectuals of the Reformist current.

The latest parliamentary elections in Iran were based upon the exclusion of the major reformist candidates who could not acquire more than a minority of less than the third of the seats of the parliament. In that respect, they are somehow "tolerated" by the theocracy without their being able to put into question the major tenets of the system.

In some ways, the Iranian experience of "tamed opposition" can be generalized to most of the oligarchies who "recruit" a "tamed opposition" in order to promote political stability within the system: they represent part of the "civil society", they are "within" the political apparatus, but they are denied any real capacity to change the nature of the regime. The only opportunity they wield is to wrest marginal advantages from the political system, particularly in times of crisis.

### **3-The new types of monarchistic structures in the Middle East and North Africa**

One can distinguish between three kinds of monarchistic structures:

-The prevailing monarchies: the Moroccan and Jordanian and to a lesser degree, the Saudi cases

- The monarchistic Republics: the Syrian (the son replaced the father), the Egyptian (the son is supposed to replace the present Rais). Here, there is a leader who is beyond the others, his situation being not "primus inter pares" but that of an individual who raises himself beyond the others.

- The monarchistic oligarchies: someone is elected within the ruling oligarchy or someone is coopted from without to become member of the ruling elite: the Algerian military, the Tunisian intelligence and military and the Pakistani military and intelligence. In this case, there is less an individual than a restricted group of people who delegate the power to one of them in order to defend the entire political system. In many cases the differences between the monarchistic oligarchies and monarchistic Republics are not great, at least during some periods of the evolution of the political system.

The first political system is a monarchy stricto sensu; the second and third are "monarchies" in the metaphoric sense of the word.

The new "monarchies" – stricto sensu or in the metaphoric sense-, at least in the Muslim world, are able to survive for the time being if they are able to integrate a "tamed opposition" within their ranks, thus weakening the status of those who put into question the legitimacy of the regime.

This seems to be the case in the three aforementioned "monarchies", in the strict sense of the word as well as in the metaphoric sense. The Moroccan monarchy has been able to "tame" for the time being the opposition by integrating part of it, as a minority, in the parliament, notably the Islamic Justice and Development. The Egyptian Republic has given some leeways to the Muslim Brotherhood in the latest elections, as a minority in the parliament.

In these cases, the partial integration of the "legal opposition" into the system marginalizes and radicalizes those who do not find any answer to their questions within the political framework. Their radicalization further marginalizes them at least until the time when a real crisis puts into question the existence of the political system. But most of the oligarchies, monarchies or metaphoric monarchies.

Due to the failure of the nationalist ideologies in most of the Muslim world and particularly in the Middle East, Islam seems to be the ground for the definition of a political legitimacy in almost all the Muslim countries. In this respect, monarchies have to cope with it. Up to the

1970s, they had to manage or repress the extreme left movements within their respective societies. Nowadays, Islam has become the major ideological tenet upon which the entire political system is shaped. Even those who traditionally defended themselves as hyper-secular political systems (like the Tunisian) are becoming aware of the importance of an "Islamic legitimacy" within their rank and file and some time try hard to develop an "artificial" Islamic opposition, sufficiently "domesticated" to vindicate their legitimacy in the eyes of the Muslims at home and in the Muslim world at large.